

[Western Mass school leaders rally for funding at State House](#)

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BOSTON — Western Massachusetts school committee members and educational leaders took to the State House Monday morning to advocate for policy changes and increased funding for the region’s school districts.

At the Massachusetts Association of School Committees’ annual Day on the Hill event, a coalition of school committee members from Greenfield, the Gill-Montague Regional School District, Hadley Public Schools and the Mohawk Trail Regional School District conversed with their local legislators, lobbying for fiscal year 2025 spending, such as full funding of the Student Opportunity Act and greater reimbursements from the nearly \$553 million in Special Education Circuit Breaker fund.

“Federal COVID stimulus funding has made it possible for the Legislature to fulfill its commitment to Chapter 70 and incremental adjustments to charter school mitigation, regional transportation funding and special education transportation,” the Massachusetts Association of School Committees wrote in its document outlining public policy priorities. “We urge the Legislature to oversee that commitment and to advocate for additional funds ...”

Greenfield School Committee members Elizabeth DeNeeve, Stacey Sexton and Kate Martini were among the local representatives attending five meetings at the State House on Monday. Although the committee members advocated on behalf of all the priorities presented by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Martini said increasing reimbursements from the Special Education Circuit Breaker fund to anywhere from 75% to 90% would fill a significant need in Greenfield’s school system.

“We have a higher percentage of students in special education than the state average, and we need and benefit from the Special Education Circuit Breaker greatly,” Martini said. “We appreciate the efforts of certain legislators to raise the reimbursement for the circuit breaker to 75% and we are continuing to advocate for further assistance in that by raising that reimbursement rate to 90%.”

Alongside funding proposals, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees rallied for a number of potential policy decisions, such as the continuation of pandemic-era Open Meeting Laws allowing remote attendance and participation, as well as a full-scale review of the state’s current Open Meeting Law standards to ensure that meetings are made accessible for “21st-century” practices.

Other potential policy changes the association is advocating for include lifting the Massachusetts School Building Authority's \$800 million funding limit, giving local school districts a greater say in the expansion of charter schools and creating initiatives to protect students' due process rights when facing suspension or expulsion.

DeNeeve said that funding for special education busing, in particular, would greatly benefit Greenfield, as well as more rural school aid.

"Although we're not a rural school ... all of our neighbors are [rural] and it would affect us if we were to regionalize in the future," DeNeeve said.

Sexton said although the vast majority of lawmakers present at Monday's event already supported funding for local schools, the coalition of school committee members present at the advocacy event served as a return to the role's root meaning — being a voice for the schools.

"We are resuming a core piece of what it means to be a school committee member, which is really being an advocate for our students in our district and our community," Sexton said. "That has been a responsibility that has been left by the wayside a little bit in the past and we're just really glad to be able to be part of renewing that as a part of the culture and spirit of just what we do in Greenfield."

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